NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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No. 477 NEW YORK, FEBRUARY 17, 1906. Price, Five Cents

CAPTAIN SATAN, THE UNKNOWN

OR, NICK CARTER'S GREAT MISTAKE

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"

The supposed lad, who really was a girl in boy's clothing, speedily met with the fate of her companions. Nick then discovered that the gentleman was Pentecost's friend.

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CAPTAIN SATAN, THE UNKNOWN;

OR,

Nick Carter's Great Mistake.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE DEVIL HIGHWAYMAN.

Nick Carter was seated in his favorite chair in his study, smoking a cigar; opposite him, also smoking, was a handsome young fellow, garbed in the habit of an automobilist, who also wore that indescribable air which suggests the rich man.

The time was morning; the detective, in fact, had only just left the breakfast-table when his caller, Mr. Reginald Pentecost, was announced.

It was an unusual thing for the detective to conduct a client to his "Den," as he sometimes fondly designated his study, or his private sitting-room and library; but young Rex Pentecost was well known to Nick Carter—had been known to him since the young chap was a toddling boy, in dresses. The detective had, however, seen very little of him since his majority—a period of three years—for at that time Reginald had inherited his father's millions and had gone abroad; however, these facts have little or nothing to do with the story.

The detective had just been listening to rather a remarkable tale as unfolded by the youthful millionaire; and now he was smiling across the table at him, as he said:

"Rex, this is not the first time that I have been made cognizant of what you have just told me, but it is the first time that I have heard the story first-hand, so to speak; and it is only fair to you to admit that until now I have always regarded the thing as some kind of a hoax."

"It is anything but a hoax," replied the young man, with emphasis.

"It sounds very much like a page out of an old English melodrama," commented the detective, still smiling.

"It is no fault of mine that it didn't end in a tragedy," replied Pentecost. "I give you my word, Nick, that I fired my revolver deliberately at the thing—man or devil, whichever it is—and you know that I have the reputation

of being one of the best amateur pistol-shots in the country."

"Still——"

"Oh, I know that I hit it. I was as cool as I am now. I'm no flunker. Neither am I a coward. I had heard stories about the 'Devil Highwayman,' as he has been called, and, to tell you the honest truth, I was laying for him"

"Oh! You were, eh?"

"Yes. I have been running out nights along those roads, purposely, in the hope that I would have the good luck to be held up by him, and—well, I got my wish."

"And at the same time you failed to 'get' him; eh?"

"You bet your life I did."

The detective laughed again, quietly, and the young man continued:

"You see, Nick, although this is comparatively a new thing to the public, it is no new affair at all to the fellows of my set. Once or twice something has crept into the papers about the Devil Highwayman; but it has never been much, and what there was in print has very generally been accepted in exactly the spirit in which you have just told me that you took it."

"That it was all a hoax, perpetrated by some practical joker."

"Yes."

"That may yet turn out to be the correct explanation, Rex."

The young man shook his head in a decided negative.

"Not on your life!" he said. "You wouldn't think so, either, if you could see the thing as I saw it last night."

"Horns, hoofs, tail, and all, eh?" laughed Nick.

"Yes; horns, hoofs, tail, and all! and that's no blooming joke, either. You can laugh if you want to. I can laugh, too. I have been doing nothing else but laugh at the other fellows who have encountered the thing; but the whole affair reminds me of something that happened to me once when I was a little fellow."

"What was that?"

"I was watching a blacksmith at work upon one of my father's horses. He was making, or fitting, a shoe, and it looked very pretty, all white with the heat, and then turning red, and then—— Well, after a little, he cut off a piece of iron from one of the shoes, and it was as black and innocent-looking as anything you ever saw. I thought I would pick it up and see where all that pretty red color had gone to."

"I don't suppose you held it in your fingers very long, did you?"

"No; I dropped it right then and there; and this Devil Highwayman is just about the same sort of a joke that that one was."

"You have just said that the Devil Highwayman is no new thing to the people of your set. Tell me exactly what you mean by that statement."

"Why, I mean that we have been being held up by the fellow—or the devil, or whatever it is—right along for almost two months."

"Is that entirely true, Rex?"

"Absolutely so."

"And how many hold-ups do you suppose have occurred in that length of time? Or, to put it definitely, since the first one of your knowledge?"

"I don't know; but I can name a few of them. I should say that there had been anywhere between a dozen and twenty—or even more—since the beginning."

"Tell me of those you know about."

"Well, there is Billy Cowper; he——"

"Never mind the particulars. Just give me the names that you are sure about."

"All right. Billy Cowper, Jim Downing, Maurice Duvall, Karl von Krebs, Captain Donahue, Alfred de Langley, Paul Brown-Jones, Jack——"

"That will do, I think; at least for the present," said Nick.

"All right. But I have named only eight—and you must remember that each one of them had a party with him. There were at least four people in each one of those hold-ups, and sometimes there were five or six."

"I understand."

"I think I could name as many more."

"Never mind that now. What I wish to know is, Do each of their stories about tally with your own?"

"Why, yes, in a way. Jack Lawton—whose name you didn't let me finish—is about as good a shot with the pistol as I am. He swears that he shot straight at the heart of the Devil Highwayman, and he swears that he couldn't have missed it, either."

"Well?"

"It made about as much impression upon him as it would on a bank of fog—never touched him; see?"

Nick laughed

"And it was just so in my case I know that my bullet went where I aimed it, for I was never more cool in my life. As I just told you, I was seeking the opportunity. I went out to *be* held up, and I had been going out for that purpose every night for more than a week. I had begun to joke my friends about their haughty highwayman. I boasted that he knew that I could drive a nail at thirty paces, and that he would never dare to stand in front of my gun, and now the laugh is on the other side of my mouth."

"So it would seem."

"Then, besides Jack Lawton, there are Karl von Krebs and Captain Donahue. They both shot at it, and they both swear they hit it. I have reason to believe that they tell the truth, for they have both shot in my private gallery, and I know that they are no mean antagonists."

"That makes four of you who have failed to bring down the Devil Highwayman."

"Yes, and four crack shots, too."

"How do you account for it?"

"Lord bless you, I don't account for it. That is what we want you to do."

"Have you ever heard that the highwayman holds up anybody except members of your own set, Rex?"

"Oh, yes. He is not so particular as all that; but I have never heard that he has attempted to stop any other sort of vehicle than an automobile—and he picks out the best ones at that."

"Probably because he is aware of the fact that their owners are likely to have the most money."

"Sure! You see he is always certain of at least a couple of hundred. We always have to carry that much with us in order to be prepared to pay a fine when we happen to exceed the speed limit in one of the Connecticut or Jersey towns. There is always at least two or three hundred in the bunch, and sometimes it is as many thousands."

"But why haven't your friends made more of a stir about it, Rex?"

"I presume it is because none of them like to be laughed at. You know how the papers are in the habit of treating us fellows."

"Yes."

"They don't regard us as human beings at all. We are just money-bags, you know. Why, a hod-carrier, or a longshoreman, or a street-sweeper has more right than a millionaire."

"How much money has this highwayman gotten out of you—I mean all of you—do you suppose?"

"I haven't an idea; but it will run pretty well up into five figures. He got fifteen hundred out of me alone, last night—and that's no dream."

"And your machine is a Mercedes, isn't it?"

"Yes; a sixty-horse. With the tonneau and four people in it, I can speed her up to over seventy miles."

"But all the same you couldn't run by, eh, and twirl your fingers at the highwayman?"

"How is a chap to run by, I ask you, when the whole blooming road in front of him is crossed with red lights?"

"But you have told me that the red lights had disappeared by the time the robbery was over."

"So they had."

"And you went ahead then?"

"Certainly."

"Did you see any obstruction there?"

"Not a sign of one."

"Have not the experiences of your friends who had been held up by the highwayman been about the same?"

"Exactly the same."

"Then you must have known, even when you saw the lights in the first place, that it was the highwayman again, and that the lights were only a fake; that there was really no obstruction in the road."

"Look here, Nick, you've got an automobile of your own, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"It's a big machine, too, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Well, you tell me this: If you are driving along the road in the dark, and you see danger-signals ahead of you, will you take the chances of being ditched and killed with all on board, or will you pull up to see what's the matter?"

"I think," replied the detective, "if I had ladies with me, as you did, I would rather pull up and take my chances with a possible highwayman—just as you did."

"You bet your sweet life you would!"

CHAPTER II.

THE HOLD-UP ON THE ROAD.

"Tell me more about those red lights, Rex," said the detective presently.

"Well, there isn't much more to tell than I have already told you. There were the lights, just as I have described them—four of them. They were in a string across the road just after we rounded the bend, and it seemed to me for an instant that we must strike the obstruction, whatever it might be, in spite of all I could do."

"You threw on your emergency brake, I suppose?"

"Sure I did! So would you."

"I have no doubt of it."

"I wasn't going very fast at the time—twenty-five or thirty miles an hour, I should say, and we came to a stop in three times the length of the machine. I had a lady friend beside me, on the front seat, and, of course, she saw the lights as well as I did, and was, therefore, prepared for the sudden stop. She held on like a major; but Frank Pritchard and the young lady who sat beside him in the tonneau—they weren't looking for it, you know, and they felt the jar of the sudden stop, mightily."

"And then what? You might as well go over a part of the story again."

"All right. Then, for an instant, I clean forgot all about the Devil Highwayman. I only supposed that somebody had been tearing up the road to repair it, or something. You see, my front lights showed what looked exactly like a big heap of stones directly in front of us."

"Yes."

"I started to jump out, to go forward and have a look at the obstruction, when I heard a voice at the side of the road call out to us:

"'Hands up!'

"I suppose you know that when you hear a voice like that calling out to you from the darkness it is quite natural to look in the direction from which the voice proceeded."

"Yes."

"Fortunately, when I heard the voice, I was half-way

out of the machine; and instantly I remembered the highwayman, and knew that this was one of his hold-ups, so while I switched myself around, back into the seat, I pulled the .38 Colt that I had made ready for just such an occasion."

"Well?"

"Now, look here, Nick, when I told you about this a few minutes ago, you laughed, just as if you didn't believe it, but it is all as true as gospel."

"I won't laugh this time. Tell me all that you saw, and just how you saw it."

"A search-light shot out from somewhere—I think it was from the opposite side of the road. Anyhow, the shaft of light—and it was as strong as an acetylene light—pointed directly at the Devil Highwayman."

"Describe it carefully once more."

"The shaft of light crossed the road slantingly, directly in front of the machine. It shut out completely the red lights that had been the means of compelling me to stop. It crossed the road as I say, and fell squarely upon the figure of the highwayman, who was standing about thirty feet back from the side of the road, and just a little in advance of my Mercedes—and the circle of light showed him up as plainly as any stereopticon you ever saw at a theater."

"And he was dressed to represent the devil, eh?"

"Precisely; as you suggested a moment ago, horns, hoofs, tail, and all; and all in blood-red from his head to his heels, with the exception of his face, which was as black as a piece of jet. Not black like a nigger's, but black like a chunk of shining coal. I think it is a mask that fits tightly over the entire face."

"Well?"

"He stood there in that circle of brilliant light, and he looked rather appalling, too, if anybody should ask you."

"I haven't a doubt of it."

"Both his arms were extended. In each hand he held a revolver, and both were pointed at us."

"Naturally."

"You remember that he had just called out, 'Hands up!' don't you?"

"Yes."

"And that while I was dropping back into my seat behind the wheel I reached for my own pistol?"

"Yes."

"Well, when I dropped into the seat, I let her go."

"You mean that you fired at the highwayman?"

"Yes. One of the snap shots for which I have won a reputation on both sides of the Atlantic. If there was any way of proving my assertion true or false, I would not hesitate to bet a thousand, or ten thousand, that my bullet struck straight between the eyes of that figure, and I could swear that I saw the spark of the bullet right at that spot, after I fired."

"Between the devil's eyes, eh?"

"Yes. I could see the hole there."

"In the black face?"

"Yes. The light showed it up."

"Well, go on."

"It never feased him at all. Not a little bit. All that he did was to say, quite calmly:

"'If you try that again, Mr. Pentecost, I shall kill you. Drop that pistol!'"

"And you dropped it, of course?"

"You bet your life I dropped it—like a hot potato."

"And then——?"

"Then the highwayman laughed. It wasn't an unpleasant laugh, either."

"'That's better,' he said. 'Now, shell out!'

"'There's nothing to shell,' I said.

"'Tut-tut, Rex-ee,' he said. 'Don't lie to me.'

"Then, out of the darkness from somewhere behind us, two men appeared suddenly. They were not armed, and they didn't have to be, with that devil holding his two guns on us all the time. They made us give up our watches and jewelry, and all the cash we had in the outfit, so their haul amounted to something like three thousand all together."

"And then——"

"Then the two men who had relieved us of our dough and the other things stepped back again into the darkness and disappeared. Then the devil said, 'Good-night, friends,' and the light went out instantly, so that, of course, he disappeared.

"Then the voice commanded us to move on, and when I looked ahead, to see if the obstruction was still in our way, the red lights had entirely disappeared. My own lights no longer shone upon what had seemed to be a heap of stones. The road was clear, and—— Well, I did as I had been directed to do; I went on."

"You returned home after that, I suppose?"

"Sure thing. I hadn't anywhere else to go. There wasn't thirty cents left in the outfit—and I had had my wish."

"To meet with the highwayman."

"Precisely."

"Has it occurred to you as rather strange that the highwayman knew your name so well?"

"I don't think that there is anything about the whole affair that has not occurred to me as rather strange, Nick."

"Well, did that particular fact strike you?"

"Yes. I suppose he knows me by sight, and recognized me."

"You have already told me that it was a dark night; in fact, I know that it was—last night."

"Yes."

"Then he could not have recognized you."

"Why not?"

"For the very good reason that he couldn't see you."

"I don't see why."

"You were in the dark and he was facing a blinding blurr of light. You might have let him shoot at you; it isn't at all likely that he would have hit you."

"By Jove! I never thought of that."

"Only it is quite likely that one of his followers would have discovered that he was also armed, right then and there."

"Sure thing."

"Was there anything familiar to you in the voice that came from the Devil Highwayman when he spoke the few times that he did?"

"No; only—and this I haven't told you before."

"Well?"

"It sounded to me more like the voice of a woman than of a man. It was a deep contralto, of course, but I could almost swear that it was a woman's voice, made a trifle hoarser than common, for the occasion."

"Do you mean that there was an evident attempt to disguise the voice?"

"That is what I have thought since that time."

"Humph! What about the stature and figure of the imitation devil?"

"That is difficult to judge, under the circumstances, Nick."

"True enough."

"Remember, it was night, and a dark night at that. We were all more or less excited, particularly after that shot of mine, for the whole push have positively stated that they could see the hole in the devil's forehead after I fired."

"That might possibly be a sop to your conceit."

"No, it was not. They all make the same assertion, and they make it deliberately. Then again, there was the light shining on the figure. That would make it look rather larger than it really was, wouldn't it?"

"I'm sure I don't know," replied Nick, smiling. Then he added:

"I remember once when I was in Chicago there was a hold-up in one of the drug stores on the South Side. There was nobody but a boy clerk in the store at the time, and when I was asking him about the case I happened to say to him, 'How big was the pistol the robber pointed at you, Joe?' and he replied: 'The end I saw was about *so* big;' and he made a circle with his hands that was the size of a quart measure. I suppose your case was something on the same pattern, wasn't it?"

"Maybe so."

"Describe the figure of the imitation devil as clearly as you can."

"Well, as I have said, it was all in red, save for the face, which was black."

"Yes."

"I should say that it was six feet tall, or close to it. It had horns on its head; I couldn't see its feet, so I don't know whether the hoofs were there or not—the circle of light did not reach below the knees."

"Well?"

"The garments were not very close fitting. The waist was rather a sort of blouse, and I should say that knee-breeches covered the legs, although I am not certain about that. From the shoulders of the figure there depended a sort of cape that was fastened at the collar. I think that is about as clear a description as I can give you."

"That is all right. That will do very well. Now, I want you to do something for me—that is, if you wish me to take up this case, which I suppose is your reason for coming here to see me; eh?"

"Yes. What do you wish me to do?"

"I want you to invite to your house, this evening, every person you can find who has met with this Devil Highwayman. I wish them all to be there, if possible. I want to interview them. Will you do that? And will you see to it that they are there?"

"Sure thing."

"Then I'll be there, too, at nine o'clock to-night."

CHAPTER III.

THE MEETING OF THE VICTIMS.

The meeting which Nick Carter attended that night was an extremely interesting one from many points of view.

Every one of the persons who had met the highwayman, and had by him been relieved of money and valuables, was a person of importance in the sense that the rich are important, for they were all millionaires or the sons or daughters of millionaires.

Each one, too, had his or her own personal grievance to relate; and in every case it appeared that the facts about the robberies had been kept quiet simply for the sake of avoiding ridicule.

It seemed to be the general idea that the Devil Highwayman made his victims appear like fools.

The mere suggestion that in the twentieth century, and always within a few miles of the great city of New York, a highwayman could masquerade as a figure of Satan seemed to be utterly preposterous on the face of it.

At first, when the robberies were comparatively a new thing, and when the victims were only occasional, the announcement by any one of the set that he had encountered the highwayman had been invariably met with shouts of laughter; and the relator of such experiences could find nobody who would believe the stories thus told, save the one or two or three who had also met with Captain Satan, as they unanimously agreed to call him.

But, as the number of outrages increased, the thing began to take a serious turn.

It was no longer a subject for laughter, but rather for consternation.

It is true that thus far nobody had been injured; but among all those who had encountered the highwayman it was firmly believed that the fellow would not hesitate to shoot in the event that his orders were not obeyed to the letter.

Some of them had taken a shot at him, as Pentecost told the detective; and in each of the similar cases to that of the young millionaire the result had been the same.

Each of those men were willing to swear that they were dead shots with a pistol, that they had fired pointblank at him, and that the bullet had taken no effect whatever.

The devil had only laughed at them for their attempts to kill him, and had proceeded in each case, calmly, with the robbery.

The others besides Pentecost who had taken shots at him had aimed at his heart; and young Pentecost, realizing this, and thinking that possibly the fellow might wear something which was hard enough to stop the bullets, had aimed at his head, with the result that after shooting he was prepared to swear—as we have heard him do—that he could see the hole made by his bullet in the brow of Captain Satan.

The thing suggested the supernatural, although none of them believed in that view of the case.

But it was also mysterious.

Regarding the locality selected by the highwayman for his robberies, considerable was said, although to very little purpose.

Captain Satan never twice selected the same spot or even the same locality.

To-night he might be out somewhere on the Lafayette Boulevard; to-morrow night, out Boston Road, beyond the Bronx. The next night after that, he might be encountered half-way to Newport or on the road to Lenox, and again he would be along the Jersey flats, on the road to Trenton and Philadelphia.

But always he selected a lonely place for his work.

Always he seemed to know exactly for whom he was waiting, and called the owner of the machine by name, or in some other way let it be known that he was perfectly well aware of the identity of his victim.

And always the modus operandi was the same.

First, there were the red lights across the road, to warn the automobile to come to a stop. Stones and other débris, which, from the appearance alone, seemed to be well-calculated to ditch any one of the huge machines which were the object of the hold-ups—and not only to ditch them, but to kill or maim one or more of the occupants.

Every time, also, there was precisely the same scene enacted.

A voice out of the darkness would cry out the command, "Hands up!"

Then the brilliant light always appeared, showing up the figure of Captain Satan, standing in bold relief within the shaft of light, and thus affording an easy mark for any person who was disposed to shoot at it.

Each time he stood there apparently unmoved by what was taking place around him, and always with his two revolvers leveled at the people in the automobile.

Then, out of the darkness, appeared the two men who collected the spoils of the occasion; and they made their collections and disappeared exactly as Reginald Pentecost had described his own experience to Nick Carter.

Then the light would go out, the men disappear, the red lights were lost to view, the roadway contained no signs of stones or rocks or other débris, and the road was clear before the motoring-party.

After each of the robberies was over, it all appeared like a dream to the participants.

It was difficult to believe that they had been held up on the highway and robbed of their valuables so deftly and so easily and without offering any resistance.

More than one member of the set had boasted that the highwayman could not rob *him* so and get away scot-free to tell about it afterward; but in each case the boaster fell, as Rex Pentecost had fallen.

A careful estimate of the results of the robberies and the losses placed the figure at rather more than a hundred thousand dollars in money and valuables, already, and the thing was assuming a most serious aspect.

"You can say or think what you please, Carter," said Billy Cowper, while Nick was engaged in questioning him and had laughed somewhat heartily at Cowper's account of his own affair, "and you can laugh all you please, too, but I'll tell you right here that this Captain Satan is a crack-a-jack. He's an old hand at the business, you can bank your pile on that!"

"How about what Rex told me," asked Nick. "He said that Captain Satan's voice sounded to him like a woman's. Did it strike you that way, too?"

"It didn't until afterward—but it did then, when I thought it over."

"Are you sure about that? Did it occur to you before somebody else suggested it?"

"Yes, it did."

"Would you also say that Captain Satan is six feet tall?"

"Yes; all of that. More, possibly."

"Rather formidable, eh?"

"Too much so for me, thank you."

"And you all agree that he invariably lets you be aware that he knows perfectly well who you are?"

They all agreed to that.

"You realize, don't you," continued the detective, still addressing his remarks to Cowper, "that, standing in the

ray of that intense light as he does, he is utterly unable to see you at all?"

"Oh," said Billy, "I have always understood that devils were so accustomed to fires and lights and all that sort of thing that a little more or less don't cut any ice—although fire really should cut ice, too, shouldn't it?"

There was a general smile at this apparent attempt to be funny, although it was rather lugubrious, at that.

"It is my opinion," continued Billy, "that he sees us all right."

"And the other two men—those who come out of the darkness to accept your alms; describe them to me."

"That's easy. One is a giant of a fellow, with arms and shoulders that look as if he could lift an ordinary automobile and chuck it bodily into the ditch without half trying."

"And the other?"

"He's a little, slim strip of a lad, I should say. I thought he was nothing more than a kid when I saw him."

"What about their voices?"

"I don't think they had any; or if they did they forgot to bring them with 'em."

Cowper turned toward his friends in the room.

"Did any of you hear either of those two chaps utter a word?" he asked.

There was a general shaking of heads all around the group, and Pentecost observed:

"They do the thing all in pantomime, Nick, dontcherknow."

"How so?"

"Why, if you don't shell out properly, one of them points to another pocket, where you are sure to have something stowed away, and you just have to shell out, that's all. It is exactly as if they had gone through your clothes before you started, and made a map of your belongings."

"And neither of them has uttered a word to any of you?"

There was a unanimous shaking of heads around the group; but again Pentecost spoke up:

"The big fellow can curse," he said.

"Ah! Did you hear him swear?"

"Not exactly. He only muttered it; but from what I heard I should say that he has a voice like a fog-horn."

"How was it that you heard him at all? What made him swear?"

"Well, he took a fancy to my scarf-pin. It was a peach, too—worth five hundred—and he pointed at it. I reached up and removed it from my tie, and in passing it to him I managed to jab the point of it into his hand pretty well. I made it appear as if it were an accident, but he swore just the same."

"How big is he, Rex?"

"Oh, he's away over six feet, and broad in proportion. His arms are as long as a baboon's, and his shoulders are square and high. His chest sticks out as if it were a perfect mass of muscles, and it is just as Billy says: He looks as if he could pick up my Mercedes and dump it into the ditch."

"How do you describe his companion?"

"Exactly as Billy does. He looks as if he might be a kid."

"I suppose they are both masked?"

"Sure thing."

"What about the rest of their costume?"

"Just rain-coats that reach to their feet, almost, and with big pockets on the sides into which they drop their plunder."

"What do they wear on their heads?"

"Automobile caps pulled well down over their eyes."

"And they show no weapons?"

"No; I suppose they have them, however, ready at hand in those big pockets."

"But none of you have seen any?"

"No; not one of us."

"Now, when they have appeared and robbed any of you in the manner you have described, have any one of you ever seen evidences that they had gone to the place where the robberies were committed in an automobile?"

There was a general shaking of heads.

"Have none of you seen any suggestion concerning their means of arriving at the places where the robberies have occurred?"

"No," came the general answer; but here Billy Cowper spoke up again.

"I have," he said.

"How was that?" asked Nick.

"Well, the night I was robbed, I saw four saddle-horses standing hitched in a grove just beyond where they held me up, and I have since thought that the horses belonged to them. It didn't occur to me at the time, but I have thought so since then."

"But there were four horses, instead of three," said Pentecost.

"Sure," said Nick; "and there were four robbers. One of them operated the light; eh?"

"Sure thing. I forgot that."

CHAPTER IV.

THE SECRET TOLD BY FOOTPRINTS.

The morning following the meeting of the victims of the highwayman, Reginald Pentecost, in accordance with a suggestion made by the detective, called for Nick Carter with his big Mercedes automobile at nine o'clock.

Billy Cowper was with him, and as Nick asked Chick to go there were just four persons in the machine when it started out to conduct the detective to the scene of the hold-up where Pentecost had met with such a remarkable adventure.

The place was a lonely spot where, for a rather long stretch, there was not a house; and it was, as he had told the detective, just beyond a slight bend in the road.

On the right-hand side of the roadway there was quite a steep ascent over a bank, and beyond the fence at the top of the bank was a dense wood, which, however, did not descend to the highway.

It was an ideal spot for just such a scene as had been enacted there, and the detective could not help smiling an approval of the sagacity of the highwayman.

"The great point," he said to Pentecost, as he descended from the motor-car, "is to discover how it happened that the highwayman knew that you were to pass here at about the time you did so; but we will get at that later. To examine the ground here is the present duty."

"Can I assist you?" asked the young millionaire.

"Not at all. I want you and Cowper to remain exactly where you are, unless I call to you to come to me. Chick will assist me in the examination; only I will tell you now that it will not amount to much."

"No? Why not?"

"I don't expect to find a thing here that will afford me any basis to work upon."

"Then why did you come here at all?"

"As a matter of principle. Is the machine standing now, as nearly as you can figure it, exactly where it was when you came to a stop night before last?"

"Yes; I should say that it is not six feet out of the way."

"Where did the Devil Highwayman stand when the light was thrown upon him?"

"Over there. About where that stump is. Do you see it?"

"Yes."

"I should say that he must have leaned against that stump almost; at least he must have been very close to it."

"All right. Now, where, should you say, was the light?"

"Yonder. It crossed the road slantingly—so fashion."

"I see. Now, where did the two men appear from who received the plunder?"

"Out of the darkness behind the machine. I did not see them at all until they suddenly appeared beside me."

"That will do for the present. Chick."

"Yes."

"Go and search around that stump while I take a look at the place where the light came from. After a little we will exchange places; and then we will take a general survey around the entire place."

They separated then to carry out these ideas, and after fifteen or twenty minutes Nick crossed the road toward the stump while Chick transferred his efforts to the places that Nick had already examined.

Another quarter of an hour was occupied in this manner, and then, without saying to the others anything of what he intended to do, Nick Carter disappeared along the road, bent almost double, as if he were following some track; and Chick continued his investigations around the scene of the robbery.

After awhile Chick desisted.

He climbed back into the automobile and lighted a cigar, whereupon Pentecost demanded, with some asperity:

"Well, why don't you tell a fellow what you have seen?"

"Seen?" Chick laughed. "I have seen a road, some grass, a few bushes, the sky, a side hill, a few wheel-tracks, an automobile containing two very curious and impatient young men—and the highwaywoman's finish!"

"Eh? What is that?"

"You heard me, didn't you?"

"Yes. Was I right then in supposing that Captain Satan is a woman?"

"I cannot say positively as to that. But I can assure you that there was not only one, but two women in that party."

"You don't say so!"

"I do say so. One of the two who approached you out of the darkness, and who received the things they stole, was a woman. That was the one whom you each thought was a youth."

"Sure," said Billy Cowper. "I have thought it all along, only I didn't dare say so."

"Why not?"

"Well, I have been laughed at about enough to suit me."

"Why did you suppose her to be a woman when you were robbed?" asked Pentecost.

"From the way she walked when she went away with the goods. I only saw her take a few steps, mind you; two or three at the most—but she walked like a woman, all right. Did you find her tracks, Chick?"

"Yes."

"Where was the other woman? The second one? Was she Captain Satan?"

"No. I don't think she was Captain Satan."

"You don't?"

"No; but all the while that Captain Satan stood there, near the stump, focused by the strong light from the other side of the road, the second woman was not three feet away from him. In fact, she was exactly behind the stump, and part of the time that you were here, Pentecost, if not all of it, she was lying down so that she was more thoroughly concealed."

"That's funny, isn't it?"

"Yes; I think it is," admitted Chick.

"Did you find footprints of the others of the party, as well?"

"Yes."

"Captain Satan's, too?"

"Yes."

"Were they like a woman's?"

"Hardly. I think they were number eleven's, at least."

"And the big chap? The fellow who cursed when I stuck the pin into him?" asked Pentecost.

"Oh, they are all around here; everywhere."

Chick paused and seemed to muse a moment; then he added:

"A strange thing about those footprints is that they are exactly like those made by Captain Satan."

"Where he stood, over near the stump?"

"Yes."

"Well," said Pentecost, "I should say that the two men are about the same size; but you can play your pile on the fact that they were not the same. Satan stood over there with his two guns leveled at us all the time that the big fellow was taking toll. Where the devil do you suppose that Carter has gone to?"

"It looked to me very much as if he was going up the road, when I saw him last," grinned Chick.

"He looked as if he had found something," suggested Cowper.

"Here he comes, now," said Chick. "He can answer for himself."

The detective joined them a moment later, and, climbing into the car, he said:

"Let us get back as quickly as possible."

"Tell us what you have discovered," said Pentecost, as he backed the car around and started away.

"I have found," replied Nick, slowly, "that you were robbed here, night before last, by a highwayman who is known to you as Captain Satan, and that he got away with the goods."

"Pooh! I knew that much before."

"Well, you will know more about it after a little while. Just at the present time you will have to remain ignorant."

"Haven't you discovered anything at all?"

"Oh, yes, a good deal; but I don't care to talk about it just at present."

"But Chick has told us about his discoveries."

The detective turned to his assistant.

"How much have you told them, Chick?" he asked.

"Only that the chap they thought was a boy was really a girl, and that another female was stretched out on the ground behind the stump all the while that the robbery was going on. Oh, yes, and of the likeness between the footprints of the big fellow and his master, Captain Satan."

Nick turned again to Pentecost and Cowper.

"Have you two got all that down carefully in your memories?" he asked.

"Yes," they replied.

"Well, forget it."

"What's that?"

"Forget it. Forget that you ever heard it. If you want me to work out this case, and expect me to take you at all into my confidence, you must both agree that you will not say a single word about anything we do, to any of your friends."

"But, Carter, they are all really quite anxious to hear what we have accomplished. I know that several of them will be waiting at the club for our return to hear what has been done. They are really as much concerned as we are, you know."

"I have no doubt that some of them are."

"Eh? What do you mean by that?"

"Just what I say."

"But there was something behind what you said."

"Yes, there was; and when you two have agreed to what I just now asked of you perhaps I will do a little talking."

"Oh, we agree all right. Don't we, Billy?"

"Sure thing."

"I expect," said Nick, slowly, "that both of you are on terms of genuine intimacy with the Devil Highwayman, whom you call Captain Satan, if you only knew it."

"Do you mean that he is one of our set?"

"I mean that at least he has a confederate who is a member of your set; but no, I do not mean that the real leader of the robbers is one of your friends—although that may be possible, also. But I will tell you this much. The leader of the outfit—the real Captain Satan, is a woman."

"A woman?"

"That's what I said."

"The little one who came to the automobile and took the swag?"

"No; the other."

"The one behind the stump, eh?"

"Yes. The one behind the stump."

"I say, Nick, what kind of footprints did you find over at the opposite side of the road, where the highwaymen placed the search-light? Were there any there at all?"

"Yes. We found some there."

"What were they like?"

"I think," said the detective, "that we will not discuss the affair any more at present. That is not because I hesitate to take you two into my confidence, but it is because Chick and I would like to talk it over together first. We are neither of us quite certain of our ideas yet, for the reason that we have had no opportunity to exchange them. After to-night we will let you know what we know—provided you will both keep your tongues between your teeth."

"Oh, we will do that all right. Won't we, Billy?"

"Sure."

CHAPTER V.

A WOMAN'S HAND.

It was quite late in the afternoon before Nick Carter and his chief assistant found an opportunity to discuss their matter alone together, but at last it came about; and, as we are permitted to look into the study while they sat there together, we will listen to what was said.

Before the conversation began, Nick Carter went to a shelf whereon he had placed a small parcel which was carefully wrapped in his handkerchief, and which he had placed there immediately after their return from the scene of the robbery.

This he placed on the table before him, but he did not remove the covering.

"What is that?" asked Chick.

"That," replied the detective, "is a very interesting find I made while we were out this morning. I will show it to you presently."

"All right."

"Now, Chick, I think we came to about the same conclusions about that affair."

"I know how I sized the thing up, but I haven't the least idea that you will uphold me in my opinions," replied the assistant.

"Tell me what they are. I will nod when I agree with you, and I will shake my head when I do not."

"Well, Nick, I quite share your opinion when you say that the real Captain Satan is a woman."

Nick nodded.

"And that she remained on the ground behind the stump all the while that the robbery was going on."

The detective nodded again.

"I think, also, that she could see the automobile from where she was lying, and that the figure of Satan took his cues from her."

Nick shook his head.

"What is the matter now? Don't you think she could see the occupants of the automobile from her position?" asked Chick.

"Oh, yes. Without doubt."

"Oh! You object to the other part of what I said; about Satan's taking his cues from her?"

"Never mind that just at present. Go ahead."

"The person across the road with the light was another woman, also."

Nick nodded.

"So, in the robber outfit, there were three women and two men."

Nick shook his head.

"What is the matter now?" asked the assistant.

"Go ahead. I will explain when it is my turn to talk."

"Well, we both found the tracks of horses, didn't we?"

"Yes."

"And you followed the tracks away from the place—that is one of them. There were only two saddle-horses that came directly to that spot. How many more did you find after you had traced those two?"

"Two more."

"Only four altogether?"

"That's all."

"Then one of the party must have walked, or have had some other means of conveyance."

Nick shook his head again; but he said nothing.

"Oh, come!" said Chick. "You do the talking. I think I will be worth more in making an occasional suggestion to you as you proceed than I will in this way."

"All right," said Nick. "In the first place, there were only four persons in the robber outfit."

"Then how do you account for the fifth?"

"The fifth was a dummy."

"Eh? What!"

"The fifth was a dummy. The figure that stood near the stump with the light shining on it was a dummy—a stuffed figure, if you please, or a wax-figure, or some kind of an apparatus other than a human being. That is why all the bullets that have been fired into it have had no effect upon it."

"By thunder!"

"I suspected it from the first—from the moment that Rex told us about it, for I happen to know that he is no boaster when he talks about his marksmanship; and, moreover, I know that he possesses abundance of nerve, if he is a dilletante, and a youthful millionaire."

"Go on, Nick. You have interested me, and I think I see it all now."

"The woman behind the stump was the real Captain Satan. The figure in front of it was only a stuffed figure, or a rubber one, blown up for the occasion."

"That isn't likely," said Chick, "for if that were so a bullet-hole would let the air out of it and the thing would collapse."

"Unless it were blown up in sections—which I am inclined to think is the case."

"And the woman on the ground behind the stump——"

"She was the chief of the outfit."

"Of course."

"It was she who called out, 'Hands up!' From the position in which she was lying, she commanded a view of the Mercedes and its passengers. I haven't any doubt that she also held a revolver in either hand, and that she kept them leveled at the people in the automobile."

"That goes without saying."

"If she had had occasion to shoot, she would probably have done so; and if she had those who heard the shot or who felt the effect of it would have been willing to swear that it came from the figure of the devil that was standing in the shaft of light."

"Exactly on the same principle that they thought her voice came from that figure, eh?"

"Precisely."

"And then, what?" asked Chick.

"When everything was all ready and the people in the automobile were sufficiently cowed, she signaled for the two who really did the plundering to proceed with their work—and there you are."

"There is one thing about it that puzzles me considerably," said Chick.

"There are a great many things about it that puzzle me," said the detective.

"Of course; but you know what I mean."

"Well, go on."

"All the people who have been robbed agree that when they saw the red lights, and stopped their machines directly in front of them, they saw, or thought they saw, a heap or many heaps of stones and rocks piled directly in front of them; and yet, the moment the operations of committing the robberies were finished, those red lights disappeared, and with them the stones and the rocks. From seeing with their own eyes and therefore believing that there was in each case a mass of rubbish in the way, they were suddenly made aware that there was nothing at all. Now, how do you explain that?"

"Very simply."

"I will confess that I would like to hear how you do it."

"The red lights were produced by the same agency that supplied the search-light."

"Oh, I have never doubted that."

"Being red, they were not especially clear. Red light multiplies certain effects. Any stage-manager at a theater will tell you that."

"I'll admit that, too."

"Then all you have to do is to have ready at hand a very perfectly painted stretch of canvas, representing rocks and dirt and other things. When the moment comes to use it, you stretch it across the road and make it fast. Along the top of it is a stout rope which serves two purposes; one is to hold up the 'scenery' and the other is to support the red lights These are reflected down on the painted scene, and as you rush up toward it in your machine you could swear that you see rocks—just as you could swear that you see lots of things which you really do not see at a theater."

Chick nodded his head with emphatic approval.

"I think that is all very clear now," he said. "Then the big fellow with the gruff voice who did the cursing when Rex jabbed the pin into him was the only man in the outfit, eh?"

"Yes."

"Where did the tracks of the two horses lead you, Nick?"

"I walked up the road about half-a-mile, I should think. There I came to a side road that is not much traveled. The horses had turned into that. Not very far from the turn, the road entered the same piece of woods that stretches along the side of the main road but which does not come quite down to it."

"Yes."

"And there I discovered that the horses had been turned into the woods. I followed, and presently found where the four horses had been tethered together while the robbery was going on."

"Yes."

"I supposed you noticed, when I took up the trail after the horses, that the tracks only passed in one direction? In other words, that although the horses were ridden away from the place where the robbery was committed there was no evidence anywhere to be found that they had come there?"

"No; I just saw the tracks of the horses. I did not study them at all, because I saw that you were doing so."

"Then you did not notice that up to that point in the road approaching from the east the roadway is so hard that it would not take an impression at all, but that beyond that point to the west it is entirely different—a sort of clay, in fact, which takes and holds an impression readily?"

"No. I did not notice that."

"You would have done so had you been studying the same thing that I was. That was the fact which first interested me in reference to the trail of the horses.

"Now, you see there were two tracks which appeared to leave that spot. As a matter of fact, they merely passed the spot, coming from the east, and going west. At the corner of the roads that I have mentioned, they met the two other horses; that is, four people came together. Then the four turned up the old road together and entered the woods; and here is an interesting thing to remember, too."

"What is that?"

"At the corner where the horses met with the other two those they met were attached to a vehicle, and from the tracks it made I should judge that it was some sort of a covered carriage."

"Oho! So that's the game is it?"

"Yes. You see at first I did not connect the two saddle-horses with the carriage-horses; but when the carriage turned into the woods with the saddle-horses I saw that they belonged to the same party."

"Of course."

"Two of the people rode in the carriage. The remainder of the space in the vehicle was used to store their 'scenery.' A self-feeding acetylene-lamp which would burn for an hour or more, the painted scene, the red globes, wire, and all that. These they carted back to the place where the robbery was to occur."

"I see. I see it all now."

"Well, I wish I saw it all; but I don't."

"What have you got that is so carefully wrapped up in that handkerchief, Nick?"

"I've got the imprint of a hand."

"Of—what?"

"Of a hand. It was very beautifully outlined on a bank of clay near which the owner of the hand seated herself to rest. When she got up she leaned on the clay and left the imprint of her hand there. I found another piece of clay and molded it very soft, with water—and with that I took a perfect impression of the woman's palm."

CHAPTER VI.

NICK CARTER'S CLUE IN CLAY.

There are certain kinds of clay so fine in texture as to be almost like velvet to the touch, and it was one of the best of these that Nick had fortunately hit upon while conducting his investigations in the woods where the highwaymen had stopped to await the hour for their premeditated attack upon Reginald Pentecost and his party.

Chance, and nature, too, had assisted him then.

He had found imprinted upon a bank of clay the perfect representation of a woman's palm and near it another clay of a different color and of much finer quality.

This he had used as one might utilize wax, and with it, after much painstaking care, he had succeeded in making a perfect impression of the hand that he could carry away with him.

But he did more than this; he carried away both impressions—the one he had made himself, which was a positive, and the one from which he made it, which was a negative.

He now unrolled the handkerchief and placed the two chunks of clay on the table between himself and Chick.

"I expect, lad," he said, "that the time will come in this case when we will have rather a hard time to identify our female Captain Satan—unless, of course, we can succeed some time in catching her red-handed, which I very much doubt. I am afraid that she is too slick for that."

"Do you still adhere to the opinion that those robbers are society people?"

"Sure; I do. How else would it be possible for them to be all the time so well posted in regard to the movements of the people they wish to rob?"

"Give it up, Nick."

"I don't think that I shall make a very strenuous effort to catch Madam Satan in the act of committing one of her robberies."

"No?"

"No. I am going to adopt an entirely different mode of procedure from my usual conduct of such a case."

"In what way?"

"Chick, that hand has decided me on how I am to catch the highwaymen."

"Do you mean that you are going to employ palmistry as an aid?"

"I mean just exactly that."

The detective smiled when he observed something very closely resembling a sneer appear on the features of his assistant.

"I don't blame you for being skeptical, Chick," he said; "but the fact is you do not understand at all what I mean."

"All right. Perhaps you will explain. I will confess that I do not take much stock in the science of the Cheiros, the Fletchers, and the Zingaris."

"But I suppose you do take a little stock in the Bertillons; eh?"

"Oh! As for that, it is another thing altogether."

"No, it isn't. It is precisely the same thing—differently applied."

"I don't understand."

"The Bertillon method includes the identification of criminals through impressions, taken in wax, of the tips of their fingers and their thumbs, doesn't it?"

"Sure."

"Well, this woman—this female Captain Satan—did not think to leave me the impression of the tips of her fingers or of her thumbs; but she did leave a very good impression of the palm of her right hand."

"Oh! I see."

"I am not silly enough to go to any fortune-teller and to have this impression of a hand read to me exactly as if it were the horoscope of some person. Not at all."

"Then——"

"Wait. I am going into the fortune-telling business myself."

The assistant bounded from his chair and clapped his hands together.

"Bully!" he cried.

"Do you see through the mill-stone, now that I have bored a hole in it?" asked Nick.

"You bet!"

"I suppose you wondered why I stopped at the *Herald* office on the way home to-day. You did not ask me about it, but I could see that you were curious."

"I was."

"Well, if you will take the trouble to look at the *Herald* in the morning, your curiosity will be rewarded. You will find there an advertisement—which cost me rather more than five hundred dollars, by the way—which Hassan El Terik-Mir, the Prophet from the East and the only of onlies in everything pertaining to the supernatural—and a lot more trash of the same order—will be at the Hotel Mammoth after to-day, prepared to make engagements to confer the blessing of his marvelous attainments and talents upon all who have a desire to meet him. He announces in his advertisement that he not only reads the future with perfect exactness, but that he

has the power of changing that future for the people who repose confidence in him. In other words, that, beside foretelling what will happen to a client, he has the power actually to control fortune. Oh, it is a beautiful ad., Chick."

"And Hassan El Terik-Mir is yourself, of course."

"Sure. I announce that the great Hassan will not receive clients at his rooms; he must in each case go to the client, in order to be surrounded by that person's atmosphere—and a lot more rot of the same kind."

"It's a cracking good idea, all the same."

"But the master stroke of it all is in the price I charge for consultations."

"How is that?"

"The advertisement announces that the great Hassan will not consider any fee that is smaller than one hundred dollars; and that in every case he reserves the right to refuse utterly to read a fortune in cases where there are reasons where he wishes to decline. In such instances, even if he is offered thousands of dollars, he will still refuse. Now, what do you think of that?"

"I think it is a master stroke."

"I think so, too. It will so excite the curiosity of the rich society women of the city who count a hundred dollars as nothing that it will bring them all—or at least all of them whom I care to see, into my net."

"And if you refuse one or two, to start with——"

"Exactly."

"Even if you were offered ten thousand dollars to read for them——"

"Now you have hit it."

"You will have so excited the curiosity of those people that they will flock to you."

"That's the idea."

"And among them you expect to find the woman who is the real Captain Satan. All the same, she may not go to you at all."

"I have thought of that possibility, and am prepared for it."

"How?"

"Why, here and there I will pick out one or more of my clients who are women of the set I wish to reach. I will accept informal invitations to their houses, and I will consent to look at the palms of the guests, as a compliment to the hostess, and for no pay at all. In that way I will catch the one I am after."

"Do you think that you would recognize her palm, from these impressions, if you should see it?"

"Just as readily as I would recognize Reginald Pentecost if he should enter the room at this moment."

"And you intend to start in to-morrow morning?"

"This afternoon, really. That is, we will arrive at the hotel this afternoon. I have already telephoned for the accommodation."

"Did you say *we?*"

"Yes. You will accompany me, of course. You will act as my companion, and you will go with me wherever I go."

"Splendid. You mentioned the name of Reginald Pentecost a moment ago. Do you intend to take him into your confidence?"

"Certainly not. I shall take nobody into my confidence; but all the same he will be one of the very first to consult me."

"How do you know that?"

"In talking with him to-day I managed to bring the subject of our conversation around to palmistry, and I mentioned incidentally that I took no stock in the thing at all; but all the same I could tell him one rather remarkable thing, etc.; and then I referred to this very Hassan El Terik-Mir, whom I met in Cairo. I assured Pentecost that Hassan was really a wonderful man—and then I remembered that he was now somewhere in this country. I believed that I had seen an announcement of his in a San Francisco paper some time ago, and I told him that I really shouldn't wonder if the fellow came to New York before he returned to his own country. He will see that advertisement in the paper in the morning and he will be one of the very first to appear. After that, if he does not send his friends to me, I shall be greatly mistaken, for I know enough about Rex to paralyze him with what I will have to tell."

"And only last night you made the acquaintance of almost every member of his particular set."

"Correct. You are getting the idea now, all right."

"What is our make-up to be, Nick?"

"Turbaned Turks, of course. We have all the things in our wardrobe; and you and Joseph can spend the remainder of the day in packing half-a-dozen trunks with all the finery of that description that you can cram into them. Jackson's Express, which has served us so well many times before, will convey our things to the hotel exactly as if they came from afar."

"And what time are we to arrive?"

"Oh, some time this evening. The hour of arrival is not really important. The thing is to obtain the first client after our arrival; and for that I rely upon what I have already said to Pentecost."

"And the rest will be easy."

"Dead easy."

Chick leaned forward and picked up the negative mold of the hand and held it before his eyes.

"I should judge that the original of this is rather a pretty hand," he said.

"It is a beautiful hand—but weak," said the detective.

"And by the same token the owner of the hand should be a pretty woman; eh?"

"Beautiful—and young."

"Young? How do you know that?"

"By the hand. I can always tell a woman's age by studying the palm of her right hand."

"How old is this one, then?"

"Twenty-two—and unmarried."

"The devil! You don't mean to say that you can tell that, too?"

"As sure as you are alive."

"I don't suppose you include the color of her hair and eyes, the modulation of her voice, the name of her pet poodle, and all that, do you, Nick?"

The detective laughed.

"Chick," he said, "if you step out of doors when there isn't much air stirring, and if you then wet a finger and hold it up, you can tell which way the wind is blowing, can't you? And if it is blowing from the east, and you are on the Atlantic coast at the time around New York, you can rather safely prognosticate rain, can't you?"

"I suppose so."

"Well, hands are read in much the same way. Certain indications point to certain causes, and each one of those causes point to well-defined effects. That is all there is about it."

"It sounds easy."

"You will find that it is easy—when you see me do it."

CHAPTER VII.

THE WIZARD FROM THE EAST.

"Chick!"

"Yes."

"Listen to me, now."

"Yes."

Nick Carter, who had been the first to speak, uttered the next sentence in the language of the Turks; and he said:

"We are here now, we are well started on our new adventure, and we are bound to succeed. You are almost as good a linguist as I am, and from this moment until we are done with this play-acting we must not utter a word to each other in any language but the one I am using now."

"Turkish?"

"Yes. Another thing that is equally important, *you* are not to understand or comprehend a word of English, or any other language but Turkish. Have you got that jotted down in your memory?"

"Indelibly."

"I shall, myself, speak English quite fluently, but with a pronounced accent; you will understand nothing but what is supposed to be your native tongue."

"All right. I'm on."

The two had just arrived at the Hotel Mammoth. They had just been conducted to their rooms, and the porters had only gone after having unstrapped the several trunks and placed them where the great Hassan directed. Down on the hotel register it appeared that the new arrivals were:

"Hassan El Terik-Mir and Abdul Bermid-Mir, Constantinople and Cairo."

They had been the cynosure of all eyes when they stalked into the hotel arrayed in their gorgeous robes that were studded with precious stones, but they had gone directly to their rooms—apparently to avoid publicity, but in reality only to attract the more attention.

At the hotel desk, Nick had been informed that already there had been inquiries made for him, and that his arrival was eagerly expected; but he had only nodded in reply.

As soon as they were in their rooms, two of the trunks were at once relieved of their contents, which proved to be gorgeous Turkish decorations; and these were placed about the apartment until it assumed a genuinely Oriental appearance.

And then, just as the work of decorating was completed, there was a knock at the door, and Chick, at a sign from his chief, went to open it.

One of the hall boys was there with two cards on a silver salver, and these Chick took to his master.

They were the cards of Reginald Pentecost and William Murray Cowper.

Nick, in his most stately manner, motioned for the hall-boy to draw near, and then he said:

"Tell the gentlemen that I am very greatly fatigued from traveling. I can receive only one of them this evening. Tell them that makes no difference which one, but that only one may come up to-night. That will do."

He waved the boy away, and when the door had closed turned to Chick, and in Turkish, of course, since they had agreed always to converse together in that tongue, fearing the possibility of listeners, he said:

"It will be Pentecost who comes up, I think. Now, watch me."

Within a very few moments there was another tap at the door, and when Chick opened it Reginald Pentecost appeared on the threshold.

"Enter," said Nick, in very fair English. "You have honored me, sir, by so early a call after my arrival in the city. Be seated, sir, if you please. I will greet you only, to-night. I am too greatly fatigued to talk business at all. You are, I believe, the gentleman whose name is upon *this* card," and he extended the one which bore Pentecost's name.

Pentecost nodded.

"Yes," he said. "My name is Pentecost, though how you knew it—but I suppose you know a lot of things which I will not understand. I wished to call, sir, to tell you about rather a strange coincidence connected with your arrival here."

"Indeed?" said Nick. "What is that?"

"It was only last night that I heard your name mentioned by a gentleman who knew you in Cairo."

Nick raised his brows and shrugged his shoulders.

"His name is Carter. Possibly you may remember him."

Nick showed his teeth in a winning smile, and protested:

"I do not take the trouble to remember all the persons who make my acquaintance. It is while they are with me that I know them; after they depart I forget them. You, for example, I already know as well as if you had lived—what shall I say?—next door to me all your life; but to-morrow, or next week, or next month, you will have passed from my memory as the rain-clouds disappear beyond the horizon."

Pentecost smiled somewhat superciliously, and replied:

"I wish to make an appointment with you. I wish to consult you about——"

"Pray do not tell me about what you wish to consult me. Let me discover that. You see, my dear Mr. Pentecost, you are still quite a young man. You are only twenty-four. You lost your father when you were eighteen years old, and came into your present fortune at twenty-one. You consort with an extremely fast set of young people, but taken all together, when one considers the temptations that are thrown in your way, you are rather an exemplary young man—much more so, in fact, than the young man who is your companion, and who is now awaiting you down-stairs. I suppose you saw my advertisement in the paper? No?"

"Yes. That is why I am here. I wish to consult you as soon as you will consent to make an appointment for me."

"I will see you in the morning at ten o'clock, then; but not here. You understand that?"

"Yes."

"I will go to your house at that hour."

"And may I——"

"You may have three of your friends there to meet me also, if you wish it, and I see that is the question you were about to ask."

"Yes."

"But they must be divided. I mean by that, two of them must be females, and one other male than yourself. You understand, do you not, that I will not consent to read their futures for them at your house; but I will permit them to hear me read yours if you care to have them do so. In all cases where I give a thorough reading, I must go to the home of the client."

"So I understand."

"You seem to be in some trouble at the present time, Mr. Pentecost; however, I will not anticipate the morrow. I will ask you to excuse me now."

"May I make one request, sir?"

"Certainly. What is it?"

"My friend down-stairs would like permission to see you, if only for a moment."

"Very well. Send him up when you go down. Good evening, sir."

Chick ushered Pentecost from the room, and a few moments later Cowper appeared.

He was conducted into the room as Rex had been, and told to be seated; but in this case Nick remained silent after he had spoken a greeting.

"It is very kind of you to consent to see me," said Cowper. "My friend tells me that you speak English perfectly."

"I speak all languages with equal fluency," replied Nick solemnly.

"I, too, wish to make an appointment with you, to have you come to my house," added Cowper.

"To-morrow evening, perhaps," replied Nick.

"That's the idea; in the evening. If you don't mind, sir, I would like to make it a small party, and ask you to dine with me. You see, Mr. Pentecost and I have talked together about you to-day—and it seems that he knew something about you before, from one of his friends—and we know lots of people who would like to meet you."

The detective bowed.

"Some of them are ladies. They are in society, and they don't like the idea of coming here to make an appointment with you; but if you would consent to meet a few of them at my house the appointments could be made without any difficulty."

Nick nodded.

"At eight o'clock to-morrow evening, then," he said. "Now, Mr. Cowper, let me look at your right hand a moment."

Cowper extended it eagerly, and Nick, after a casual glance at it, waved it aside.

"You drink too much wine, Mr. Cowper," he said. "You live altogether too fast. I should strongly advise that you discontinue those weekly card-parties that you are in the habit of holding at your house, and to which your young wife so strongly objects. Your losses are very heavy, and, great as is your fortune, it cannot last forever under such a drain as you are subjecting it to at present.

"Do not interrupt me. I will say, more than that, that your wife's ill health is largely—almost entirely, in fact, due to the fast life you lead. You would do well, Mr. Cowper, if within a fortnight or three weeks you would take her abroad and stay there until her child is born."

"Great Scott, sir! How the dev—— I beg your pardon."

"Do I surprise you?"

"Surprise me! Well, I should say you do."

"I think," continued Nick calmly, "that you have al-

ready been advised that you should take your little daughter, who is now three years old, to the German physicians. I think, also, that you have rather loudly proclaimed that there are just good doctors in America as there are anywhere else in the world. You are, however, mistaken about that. You should take her away at once, as I have said."

"You are certainly a wizard, Mr.—— Please tell me how I am to address you?"

"Merely as Hassan. I wear no titular prefix to my name. I see, by the way, that your weekly card-party is on for this evening. If you should like to please me, I would suggest that as soon as you leave me you communicate by telephone with your friends who comprise that party, and inform them that it will be impossible for you to entertain them to-night. And then——"

"Yes."

"If you will manage to pass the evening with your wife, you will enjoy a much better fortune when I outline it for you to-morrow evening."

"Do you mean that something would happen to me to-night, that——"

"I mean that if you do as I suggest you will avoid something which you should avoid; and I see that you have already decided to follow my request. It is well. You must excuse me now. I am greatly fatigued."

Cowper left the room with many a protestation of his great obligation for the favor that had been shown him, and in going out he called back:

"We won't count the cost, Hassan, of your services to-morrow evening. You may make the bill whatever you please, and I will pay it gladly."

After he was gone, Chick burst into a convulsion of silent laughter.

"It beats the band," he said.

"It is good fun, too," admitted the detective.

"Think of your advising him to give up gambling and to stay at home with his wife!"

"Chick, I can make him do both of those things, and he will forever be grateful to Hassan El Terik-Mir. I might as well accomplish all the good I can while I am about it."

"Sure."

"And I certainly will accomplish some in this case."

"I only hope that none of them will get on to the fact that Nick Carter has mysteriously disappeared, and so connect you with him."

"Oh, I have taken good care of that end of it. If Pentecost or Cowper should go to the house, Joseph and Patsy and Ten-Ichi know how to take care of the situation. You need have no fears about that part of it."

"Well, I suppose we've got to remain shut up here for the balance of the evening?"

"No, Chick. We will go to the opera. I already have a box—and a good one, too."

CHAPTER VIII.

NICK CARTER THROWS THE BAIT.

Very little need be said here in regard to the appointment which Nick had made for the meeting at ten o'clock in the morning, at the house of Reginald Pentecost.

The detective had made use of that opportunity only for the sake of placing himself in touch with the people he most desired to meet; and, as he had foreseen, Rex had invited three of the most prominent members of his own set to be present with him.

With these others Nick perceived at once that he had nothing to do more than to make himself solid," so to speak, in his character as a fortune-teller; and he succeeded.

That he utterly and entirely amazed them all must be evident, for he already knew enough about each one to throw them into utter consternation at the facts he related; and when the party finally separated, and Pentecost, after dismissing his guests, offered to take Hassan back to the hotel in his Mercedes, Nick accepted. He knew that before that day came to an end his wonderful powers of divination would be heralded broadcast among the very people where he wished to be celebrated, and that he was, therefore, well started on the career which was destined ultimately to lead him, by a very direct route, to the presence of that remarkable woman who was known as Captain Satan.

Concerning Pentecost himself Nick had told him the utmost details of his life—but what was more important, he had learned, through the volubility of the young man, very much concerning him that he had not known before.

And one thing had happened—where Nick had made a deliberate guess, based upon a remark which Pentecost inadvertantly dropped—which the detective deemed of importance.

Nick had said to him, after he received the cue that has been referred to:

"Meester Pen-tay-coost, you haf, een your room for sleep, somewhere, a peek-ture; no? of a veeray beautiful young lady. You ware, just now, theenking about her; no? and you deed not know that you made me know that you ware dooeing so; no? Eef you will be so good as to geet that peek-ture—no? Yes?"

We will not take up time by detailing any more of the broken English which Nick thought it best to make use of; he talked it very rapidly, and made it sound interesting. Suffice it to say that Pentecost produced the picture at once and gave it into the hands of the supposed Turk.

To Pentecost's infinite surprise, Nick had calmly pocketed the photograph; but as he did so, he said:

"Your future, Mr. Pentecost, is very deeply concerned with this young woman. I know that after a little I shall see her; but, in the meantime, I will study her picture."

That evening, according to the arrangement made with Cowper, he attended the dinner at the home of the latter, as he had promised to do, and there he met a party of sixteen—mostly women—who had been invited to make his acquaintance; so on his return to the hotel, he considered himself very aptly launched upon his new career.

When he and Chick were alone in their rooms at the hotel that night, after their return, the latter remarked:

"Well, I suppose you consider that you are making headway, don't you?"

"Headway? I am traveling at the rate of about a mile a minute."

"Do you really think you are going to find Captain Satan among these people?"

"I not only think so; I know it."

"What! Already?"

"Yes."

"Do you mean that you have an idea as to her identity? Or that she is simply among the others of the set, as you have said all along?"

"I think I already know who she is."

"Well, I will confess that I did not see a woman during the entire day of whom I would think that she had nerve enough to undertake such a thing as holding up automobiles on the public highway and robbing their passengers."

"No; I don't think you did. I haven't seen her, either; but—look at this!"

He took the photograph obtained from Pentecost from his pocket and passed it across to his assistant.

"What do you think of that face?" he asked.

"Do you mean that this is the young woman whom you suspect?"

"Answer me. What do you think of that face?"

"I think it is one of the most beautiful that I ever saw. If the original is half as bewitching as this picture of her, she is a corker!"

"That word seems to represent your idea of the superlative, Chick," smiled the detective.

"Well, a cork is usually supposed to stop things, isn't it? Competition doesn't go if a thing is stopped, does it?"

"Never mind. What do you think of that face?"

"I have already told you."

"Oh, I didn't refer to her beauty. Anybody could see that; but there are some things in the face that everybody would not see. Don't you think so?"

"Yes."

"Tell me what you see there—besides beauty."

"Strength of character, imperiousness, haughtiness, breeding, pride, and determination; immense power for doing great good and for committing great evil if the exigencies of conditions required it; aristocratic tendencies——"

"That will do for the present. What are you up to anyhow? Are you permitting yourself to do a little guying, Chick?"

"No; not really."

"Because, if you are, you can take the car home at once, and send one of the other boys to me. Give me the picture if you please."

Chick passed the picture over to his chief, and bit his lips in vexation. It was rarely that Nick called him down quite so hard as that, and he knew that he deserved it.

"I'm very sorry," he said, after a little. "Do you wish me to go home?"

"No; stay where you are. A little guying won't hurt me occasionally, and it is always possible that I have jumped at a conclusion too soon. But in this particular case I happen to know something about this young woman."

"Oh! You do? Who is she?"

"Primarily, she is the young woman with whom Rex Pentecost is in love."

"Well?"

"He managed to keep the fact of it rather closely until by an inadvertence he let it slip this morning. You did not notice it at the time—nor would I had I not already been familiar with the antecedents of Leila Loring."

"Is that her name?"

"Yes."

"Who is she?"

"She is the descendant of a very noble English family whose fortune has been entirely dissipated. She has two sisters who are equally beautiful, although in different types. She has for more than two years been a sort of protégée of Mrs. Journey's; but, as you know, rich Mrs. Journey died about a year ago, and after that Leila Loring and her sisters were rather out of it. I happen to know that at the time there was considerable speculative gossip among the knowing ones concerning what Miss Loring and her sisters would do—if it should turn out that Mrs. Journey had not remembered them in her will."

"Which, I suppose, she did not do."

"Exactly; which she did not do."

"And then——"

"Miss Loring received a summons to England—she said. She returned there, at all events, and was absent several months. When she returned, she announced that she had been over to claim a legacy—and, if appearances go for anything, she had. It is certain that she has been well supplied with money since her return and that she has set up an establishment of her own, with her sisters and a chaperon."

"Do you mean to suggest that Leila Loring is Captain Satan?"

"No; but I mean that it is possible that she is. I would like, at all events, to study the palm of her hand."

"Well, I call that jumping at conclusions with a vengeance."

"Perhaps so. But I will know more about it by this time to-morrow night—I think."

The detective was correct in that surmise; and, in fact, the meeting came about much sooner than he himself expected, for the morning mail brought him a letter signed by Reginald Pentecost, which was as follows:

"HASSAN EL TERIK-MIR.

DEAR SIR: Will you do me the great favor to lunch with me in the oriental room of your hotel to-day at one o'clock? I include, of course, your companion, Abdul Bermid-Mir.

"It is my wish at that time to make you acquainted with the original of the photograph you requested of me last evening. I have told the lady about it, and she is considerably interested to know why you desired possession of it at all.

"Yours with great respect," etc., etc.

"She has taken the bait," said the detective to Chick, when he had read the note.

"Oh! It was a bait, was it, your taking that picture?"

"Certainly."

"You wished to excite her curiosity?"

"My dear Chick, the weak point in the armor of every human being is curiosity. I believe that as a rule it is accredited to women alone, but my experience tells me that men possess it to even a greater extent. However, in this case, the subject upon which I sought to work was a woman"

"And, as you said just now, she has taken the bait."

"Swallowed it whole."

"Do you expect to read her palm at the luncheon-table?"

"Hardly."

"But you will make an appointment with her for a private session?"

"No."

"What then?"

"She will ask me for an appointment—and I shall decline to make one."

"What?"

"Precisely."

"Why?"

"Simply to make her all the more insistent. I shall call her attention to my advertisement in the daily paper to the effect that I reserve the right, whenever I choose to do so, to refuse an appointment, no matter what price is offered."

"And you will make them both angry, eh? Her—and Pentecost; won't you?"

"That is precisely what I hope to do."

"Why?"

"Because it will be the surest way of obtaining the interview I want."

Chick was silent a moment; and then, quite suddenly, he asked:

"Nick, has it ever occurred to you that there having been three women in that robber outfit, any one of the three might have left that impression of her hand on the clay? It does not follow that it was Captain Satan herself who did it."

"Oh, yes it does, my lad. That is just what does follow."

"How do you make that out?"

"In the simplest way in the world. Do you recall that it was Captain Satan who waited behind the old stump?"

"Certainly."

"Well, do you not recall that there was a lot of rotting wood that had fallen from the stump around that spot?"

"Yes."

"Well, Chick, there were several minute bits of the rotten wood where the woman seated herself at the time she left the impression of her hand in the clay."

"Oh!" said Chick.

CHAPTER IX.

A BEAUTIFUL CRIMINAL.

At five minutes past one that day, the detective, followed by Chick, and both appearing at perfect ease in their foreign costumes, with their swarthy skins and fierce mustachios showing all the more plainly, relieved as the effect was by the white silk of their Mongolian shirts, entered the oriental room and proceeded toward the corner where they had been informed Pentecost and his companion awaited them.

Both detectives had been prepared to meet a beautiful woman in the person of Miss Leila Loring; both had thought that if she were at all as the picture represented her she must be a marvel, but neither was prepared for the actuality

To say that Leila Loring was beautiful is begging the question; to describe her beauty is impossible.

Had she been an oriental herself, her eyes could not have been darker, more alight with half-hidden fires or more slumbrously threatening in their volcanic possibilities.

Wonderful eyes they were, in truth! Black, like the blackness of the sloe-berry; alight, just as a black pearl is alight, with sudden fires, with half-hidden illumination, with always some thing evasive and yet apparent. By turns dreamy, then sombrous, then mirthful, then introspective; always filled with intelligence, ever alert; wonderful eyes!

Her hair matched her eyes in hue. It was like the wing of a raven. A dead-black, with only enough of the suggestion of glossiness to give it life. And there was such a profusion of it, too; and it seemed to resent confinement within the range of conventionality, as if there were

a touch of wildness about the woman who wore it, and her hair all the time was a thing conscious of the fact.

You might not have described her features as perfect; they certainly were not regular, and straight, and in perfect proportion. Where features are in perfect proportion, the characteristics of that person are the same. Here there were abrupt contradictions; but the entire face was matchless in its attractiveness.

If you said that Miss Loring's nose was not beautiful, the second thought convinced you that it was perfect; if you suggested to yourself that her head was not poised to suit you, a second glance convinced you of your error.

Her figure was perfect; her costuming the acme of taste; her manner—perfection.

Introductions were speedily acknowledged, the luncheon ordered, and the meal begun.

Indifferent subjects were discussed at first. Chick, of course, remaining silent for the reason that he was supposed to comprehend no English; but quite often Nick turned to him and repeated in Turkish something that had been said, thus keeping up the appearance of their parts perfectly.

The coffee had been served before the subject for which the detective waited was introduced, and then, rather to his surprise, it was Miss Loring who mentioned it.

"I am told," she said, smiling, "that you rather forcibly purloined a photograph of mine."

"I fear that I cannot deny the impeachment," replied Nick, smiling back at her. "But the taking of the picture could not be classed as a theft. Its owner saw me when I took it, and he really raised no objection."

"That was because I understand that you would, of course, return it," put in Pentecost.

"Ah!" said Nick. "I must admit that such was my intention at the time; but now, that I have seen and talked with the original, you could not be so cruel as to demand it of me, Mr. Pentecost; at least, not unless Miss Loring"—he pronounced her name Mees Loir-eeng—"will consent to replace it with another."

She appeared to take no heed of the remark, but continued:

"I am glad that you felt enough interest in the picture to take so much notice of it."

"Ah! But it is no longer the picture that interests me; it is the original of the picture."

"You are very famous, also, among my friends, for the wonderful things you tell them," she said, smiling, and again ignoring his insinuation.

"They are too kind, mademoiselle."

"You tell wonderful fortunes, I am told."

Nick shrugged his shoulders in evident deprecation of the remark.

Miss Loring was silent a moment and seemed to meditate, and then she said:

"I have never had my fortune told."

"No?"

"And never intend to do so."

"Indeed! Permit me to say that your fortune is——"

"Pardon me for interrupting you, sir, but I, less than any other person, care to know in advance what my fortune is to be. It must follow, then, that it could have very little interest for others."

"I could tell you some wonderful things about yourself, Miss Loring, without venturing upon the subject of your fortune. For instance——"

"Let me beg that you discuss some other person than myself," she interrupted him.

"Ah! It is the wonderful divination that you possess, Miss Loring. You, yourself, could be a great teller of the future if you would. It is written in your face; it speaks in your eyes. You are a mystic at heart. You have the capability of seeing in the dark, like—ah—like the nocturnal animals."

"Like a cat, for example."

"Ah, yes, if you will have it so. And you possess great courage—great physical courage. There are few men who possess as much as you do. And you have wonderful resource, great capabilities. You can accomplish great achievements. You could be a leader of many; a general of an army—another Joan d'Arc. You are excitable in temperament and quick to anger, but you are wonderfully cool in the presence of danger, and deadly calm in your excesses of passion. You are——"

She interrupted him again, cooly, dispassionately, but with emphasis.

"I am afraid that you did not hear my request," she said. "Surely you would have heeded it if you had."

"Pardon me, mademoiselle, I felt impelled to speak."

"Then won't you tell me something of yourself?"

"Of myself? Ah! It will be of little interest to you. And yet—— Well, I am what you see of me here; a wanderer over the earth. I go about telling fortunes, as you call it—not because it is a necessity in order to make my income larger, for I have more than sufficient for my needs, but because there is something within me which compels me to do so. Believe me, there have been times when I have been able to do good acts through this gift of mine. I have saved men—and women, too—from the downward path, when they were approaching too near to it; I have brought criminals to justice; I have saved others from justice, where I have seen that they were not criminals for the sake of crime, and where their wrong acts were merely passive ones, or when there were extenuating circumstances."

He paused a moment to allow the effect of his words to sink deeply into the mind, and then he continued:

"Once I saved a nation from revolution; once I saved a king from assassination—and another time I might have done so, but I permitted the assassination to proceed—and once, in Constantinople, many years ago, I did

a great service for a man of your name; a man who must have been a relative of yours, I think. He was the Marquis of Carrington, and would have been the Duke of Calumbria had he lived; but his surname was Loring." Nick Carter knew that a man of that name had once been British minister to Turkey.

"He was my uncle," said Miss Loring, quietly. "Will you tell me what you did for him?"

"No. It is long since that time. It was a personal matter—and he swore me to secrecy. You would not, therefore, have me relate it now?"

"Certainly not."

Miss Loring pushed back her chair and glanced meaningly at Pentecost.

It was the signal to leave the table, and they all did so; and ten minutes later the two detectives were back again in their rooms.

"I fancy that your trout only nibbled at that bait of yours, Nick," said Chick, as soon as they were alone.

"Do you?" asked Nick. "I very much fear, Chick, that you are losing your shrewdness."

"How so?"

"I won't be three hours older before I receive a request for a private interview with Leila Loring."

"You think so?"

"I could swear to it. I will give you my word that once, while I sat opposite her, I almost feared that she saw through my disguise; but I think I satisfied her that I was genuine when I gave her an opportunity to tell that little lie."

"What lie was that?"

"When she said that the Marquis of Carrington, who was once minister to Turkey, was her uncle. The fact is that he was cousin to her father; that is all."

"Oh. Well, why should she have lied about it?"

"For the same reason that lots of lies are told; they are so dead easy."

"Anyhow, she didn't ask for an appointment with you."

"No; but she will. She will have let Pentecost put her into her carriage. After that, she will drive to the Holland, or to some near place that is convenient, and from there she will despatch a note to me. You see?"

"Did you get a look at her hand?"

"The back of it; yes. It is a beautiful hand."

"Do you believe it to be the one that left that impression on the clay?"

"Just at the present moment, I haven't a doubt of it."

"You think she is Captain Satan?"

"I am as sure of it in my own mind as you are——"

Nick ceased abruptly, for there was a sharp rap at the door, and after a moment a letter was handed inside, which was enclosed in an envelope of the Holland House stationery.

"Ah!" said the detective, breaking the seal. "Here we have it."

After reading the letter carefully through to himself, he said:

"Listen, Chick."

And then he read aloud:

"If Hassan El Terik-Mir will call, unaccompanied, at the residence of Miss Leila Loring, No. 39 South Balmoral Square, at nine-thirty this evening, he will confer a great favor upon one who seeks his advice and assistance; Miss Loring begs that this communication will be accepted as confidential."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Chick. "That note is direct and to the point, isn't it?"

"Quite so. In that respect it is like everything else which this young lady does."

"Shall you go?"

"Shall I go! Will a duck swim?"

Chick took two turns across the room; then abruptly, he said:

"Nick?"

"Well?"

"Suppose she *is* the highwayman?"

"Well? I do suppose so. What then?"

"Shall you send her to prison?"

"It begins to look very much as if I would do that very thing."

"I wish you wouldn't."

"Eh? Why not? What is the matter with you now?"

"She is too beautiful. She is too fine. She is too—everything."

"Exactly—too everything! You hit the right word that time."

Chick took another turn across the room. Then he stopped.

"You won't want me for an hour or so, will you?" he asked.

"No."

"Do you mind if I take a turn outside? I'm getting dreadfully rusty."

"Not at all. You need not return till midnight if you care to remain out that long. It might be a good idea for you to look in at home, while you are gone, to see how things are going in our absence. But return here at midnight."

"I will," said Chick; and he went out.

CHAPTER X.

A TERRIBLE REVELATION.

It was exactly half-past nine o'clock that evening when Nick Carter, in the character of Hassan El Terik-Mir, presented himself at the door of Leila Loring's residence.

He was admitted by a pompous butler, who seemed to realize thoroughly his own importance, and was conducted to the library.

"Miss Loring is expecting you, sir," the butler said then. "She will be down in a moment."

Nick nodded, and the butler left him alone.

The detective had thought a great deal about that sudden freak of Chick's in asking to go out right after objecting—in a way—to the arrest of Miss Loring, which both detectives felt must soon follow; and now the subject returned again to his thoughts while he sat there in the library waiting for the woman whom he supposed to be Captain Satan to appear.

"That was a queer freak of Chick's," he murmured to himself for the twentieth time. "It meant something, too. Chick always was a little bit tender where a beautiful woman is concerned. Ah! Here she comes."

The door opened, and Leila appeared on the threshold; and she paused there, as if to lend an added effect to her entrance.

She was gowned exquisitely in shimmering white, and there was a necklace of pearls that was wound many times around her throat and from which a huge, blood-red ruby was pendent over her bosom; there was a corset of pearls and diamonds in her black crown of hair; her cheeks were glowing, her eyes were shining, and her lips parted just a little, showing the milk-white teeth between them.

She was as perfect a vision of loveliness as can be imagined as she stood there for the briefest interval of time before advancing into the room.

Nick rose in his place and bowed profoundly to her, and in that instant he felt something of the same impulse that must have moved Chick when he took the woman's part.

She was altogether too beautiful to be a criminal; too beautiful to arrest; too beautiful to be anything but what she appeared at that moment—a ravishing, peerless, matchless creation.

The detective caught his breath while he bowed, and felt that the conventionalities permitted him to keep [illegible] moment, until he could recover from the first [illegible] effect of her sudden appearance.

[illegible]d thought her beautiful in the afternoon; now she [illegible]re than that.

[illegible]dvanced toward him, but without extending her [illegible]nd when Nick could have taken hers she ap[illegible]ot to perceive the motion.

"[illegible]was very good of you to come," she said, simply [illegible]irectly, meeting his eyes squarely and coolly, and [illegible]t entire self-possession.

"I could not do less when you made the request," replied the detective, taking care to remember his accent.

"And did you not think it rather strange that after I had expressed myself so forcibly at the table against having my fortune told that I should within a few moments ask you to do me the favor to come here?"

"Not at all. I expected it."

"Ah! You expected it."

"Yes. I told Abdul that we would hear from you."

"Was it a part with your mysterious power that you knew that?"

"I fancied that I read the desire in your eyes, Miss Loring."

"I will have to watch out for my eyes in that case. I hope that others—Mr. Pentecost, for example—were not equally as penetrating as to my motives and desires."

"I think I was the only person who saw it."

"I must repeat that it was kind of you to come."

"The pleasure is entirely my own. To have the opportunity to see you again, to be in the presence of one so beautiful, to——"

"But I did not ask you to come here to tell me that, sir."

She laughed as she said this. Her tone and her manner were not at all as if she resented his gratuitous and rather bold style of admiration; but at the same time it did not suggest that it would be well for him to continue it.

For a moment Nick hesitated while he studied her, contemplatively—and palpably, too, so that the flush on her cheeks heightened somewhat, as if she were entirely conscious that she was made the object of unusual scrutiny; and in the meantime she motioned him to a chair and also seated herself.

"If one is to form an opinion from your manner, Hassan El Terik-Mir," she said after a moment of silence, "you seem to take an unusual interest in me."

"It is quite true," he agreed.

"Might one venture to ask why?"

"One need not ask why when you are the object of interest, Miss Loring."

"That is begging the question."

"Surely you are not ignorant of your own great beauty, mademoiselle?"

"No," she replied calmly, "I am as cognizant of that as a banker should be of the balance he carries overnight. My beauty is a part of my assets in the business of living, and it does not affect me at all to be told that I am beautiful. Rather, it offends my intelligence, just as if you were to say, 'You are breathing, Miss Loring.'"

Nick decided that it was time to change the subject, so he said:

"I suppose you had a definite reason for asking me to come here this evening?"

"I had one—yes."

"Since you will not permit me to tell you my reason for the pleasure it gave me to comply with your request, suppose you tell me why you sent for me."

"I *had* a reason—when I made the request," she replied musingly, and looking at him with a dreamy expression in her eyes; "but since I made the request of you that reason—the original one—has ceased to exist. It has given place to another one."

"Indeed?"

"And," she continued, in the same dreamy manner, "you will forgive me if I say to you that you have not told me the exact truth. I do not think it was my beauty that attracted you here to-night."

"Surely, Miss Loring——"

"Pray spare me your protestations, sir. I have told you that I *had* a reason for asking you here, and that circumstances determined me to change it."

"Yes."

"Will I offend you if I speak quite plainly?"

"Certainly not."

She was smiling rather mischievously now, and there was a dangerous gloom in her eyes, too, which the detective saw. He braced himself at once, for he realized that some surprise was in store for him, and that he had to deal with a woman who was quite as resourceful as he was himself.

"My invitation to you, primarily, was the result of my fondness for mischief," she said.

"I don't think that I quite comprehend," he made answer.

"I really intended, at that time, to ask you to tell my fortune—to read my hand, in fact."

"I should be very glad to do so."

"I haven't a doubt of it, Mr. Carter," she replied coolly, and without a change in her expression or an alteration in her manner toward him.

Nick Carter started in spite of himself.

He was obliged in that instant to admit to himself that for once in his life, at least, he was thoroughly and utterly surprised; but he remained perfectly still and waited.

"I surprised you, Mr. Carter?" she asked.

"Well, yes, rather," he drawled in reply. "Might I ask——"

"I think you told me, while we were at the luncheon-table to-day, that I possessed remarkably perception, intuitiveness, and penetration—or words to that effect, did you not?"

"I am quite sure that I did."

"I had already penetrated your disguise, Mr. Carter."

"That is strange, for I was—and still am—quite certain that you have never seen me in my proper person."

"In that you are utterly mistaken, believe me. I have seen you many times."

"Then, since you know who I really am, you have doubtless also guessed why I am here."

"I *know* why you chose to come here, sir."

"Then it would be as well if both of us should cast aside the masks we wear, don't you think so?"

She laughed softly.

"I am afraid it would be rather difficult for you to cast yours aside, since it is put on with stain," she said, "and as for myself—I wear no mask. I have none to cast aside."

"You surprise me. I supposed that we all wore masks through life—at least to some extent. Do you wish me to cross the Rubicon at once and tell you plainly of what I suspect you?"

"Such a course would be a saving of time," she replied.

"Miss Loring, don't you know of any reason why a detective should be on your track?"

"None save the one that you gave a moment ago as your reason for coming here. You stated, I believe, that it was my beauty that attracted you—and I have heard that detectives are, as a rule, rather more assured in their impertinences than—gentlemen."

It is impossible to depict the savage sarcasm with which she intoned the latter part of that sentence, and Nick felt that he flushed under the dye that covered his skin, but he replied calmly:

"I did not think to announce myself so soon; but since you have forced the issue it is as well for me to admit at once that you are charged—by me—with being the highwayman, or the highwaywoman, who is terrorizing the set of which you are the most beautiful member."

She laughed that soft, low-toned, musical laugh of hers, and murmured:

"You mean, I suppose, that I am Captain Satan?"

"Yes."

She shrugged her beautiful shoulders.

"I very much fear that your fortune-telling talents are degenerating, Hassan El Terik-Mir," she said lightly.

"Will you let me see your right hand?" asked the detective abruptly.

"No; but for the sake of your peace of mind I don't mind telling you that the clay impressions you have of the hand of your Captain Satan are not at all like the palms of my hands."

"Ah! You are aware of that, also."

"You forget that you gave me credit for the possession of occult powers, sir."

"No; I do not. I was not then half so well aware of the fact as I am at present; but I little thought that they would work in just the direction where they seem to have had the greatest effect."

"Whatever they are, you perceive that they have worked to some purpose."

"Yes; since they have discovered for me a traitor in my own camp," said the detective bitterly.

He left his chair and started across the floor as if he were about to leave the room; but he halted suddenly and returned until he stood directly in front of Leila Loring.

"Madam," he said coldly, "although I am not what I appear to be in the costume I wear, I do possess certain powers of divination. I beg you to listen to me now, calmly, for presently I shall go away as I came, and after I am gone yours will be the opportunity to go also. Your occult powers, as you call them, have a blighting and withering effect upon one man in whom, until this moment, I have placed absolute confidence. I find now that he has betrayed me—that he has betrayed me to you, because of your beauty, and of the devil that is in you. When you wrote that note to me from the Holland House, you had no idea that I was Nick Carter, nor had you any idea that I suspected you of being Captain Satan; but since that time you have seen a man who was, until ten minutes ago, my chief assistant; a young man whom I have loved as a younger brother, and as a son, although, thank God, he is no relation to me. When you see him again, tell him what I have said to you. Good night."

He wheeled in his tracks and started toward the door, just as she sprang forward to intercept him.

CHAPTER XI.

NICK CARTER'S GREAT MISTAKE.

As quick as Nick Carter was in the movement he made toward the door, Leila Loring was quicker, and she threw herself between him and the way out before he had taken three steps; and then she stood there with her back against the door, with her left hand grasping the knob and with her right one extended, palm outward, as if by means of that gesture she would force him back again into the room, although he was still several feet away from her.

And she made a beautiful picture as she stood there, in a sense defying him; in another, compelling him against his will to wait where he was; and in still another, pleading mutely against the sternness of his aspect and the corrugating pain that glowered like a black cloud over his brows.

We, who follow Nick Carter through so many adventures, know that he is rarely moved beyond the limit of his own wonderful self-control; we know that he has entire command of his temper; we know that his emotions rarely reach the surface to be depicted by another; we know that even in that time now almost two years gone, when he returned from Japan to find that his wife had been murdered, he controlled himself to calmness and went steadily about the duty of trailing down her assassin.

But now, in this moment, when he believed that Chick had betrayed him; when he believed that the lad he had found in the far West, and had taken to his heart—when he was literally forced into the belief that Chick, to whom he had given his name and his love, had been false to him, the iron entered his heart, indeed.

But he forced himself to calmness, and he stopped in his tracks half-way across the room, facing the beautiful, gorgeously gowned woman who stood there, with her back against the door, and with her right hand extended, palm outward, as if to arrest his further progress.

Both were silent. Neither uttered a word.

Nick was looking straight into her big black eyes, steadily, calmly, coldly; and she returned his gaze with that pleading, beseeching expression which she seemed to know so well how to assume.

Then, as if impelled by some force that was strange to him, the detective's eyes suddenly dropped from Leila Loring's face to that right hand which was extended toward him, palm outward, and for another full minute he stood staring at it, as if fascinated.

He remembered suddenly that that was the very palm he wished to study; he recalled the fact that in one of the capacious pockets of the Turkish costume he wore he carried the two clay impressions he had procured at

the edge of the wood where the highway robbers had rested; he realized that there would never be a better opportunity than this one to see that hand, which he believed to be the original of the impressions he carried—and he was fully aware of the fact that those impressions contained the only real means of identification he possessed, by which he could trace the crime home to the perpetrator.

With a sudden motion, as quick as a flash of lightning, he started forward and seized that delicate wrist in his grasp; and when, startled by his act, she would have wrenched it from him, he clung tightly to it, and drew her across the room toward the library table, upon which a powerful drop-light was shining.

"I will not hurt you, Miss Loring," he said, as he drew her across the room; "I will not hurt you, but I *will* see your hand. If you call for help, I will break the head of any person who interferes with me. For yourself, you are in no danger. Be seated, if you please, in that chair."

He pointed to a chair beside the table, and she sank into it, seemingly entirely passive under his commands.

He moved the light close to the edge of the table, and drawing a smaller chair forward, seated himself before her. Then he produced the clay models from one of his pockets, and placed them on the table close to her right hand, and where the strong light shone brightly and clearly.

She offered no resistance whatever, but awaited calmly his further act; but if he had looked into her eyes instead of keeping his burning gaze fixed downward, now upon her right hand and now upon the models he had brought with him, he would have seen that the ghost of a smile lingered in their somber depths, and that, although she was pale, and somewhat frightened, she was still under no apprehension.

The ticking of the buhl clock on the mantel was the only sound that startled the silence of the room—until suddenly the detective straightened himself to his full height, and began slowly to return the clay models to their wrappings.

When he had done that, and had returned the package to his pocket—he was silent all the time—he stepped away from her, and, pausing in the center of the room, said:

"Miss Loring, it becomes my duty to ask your pardon. I have made a mistake. There is little that I can say to atone for the wrong I have done you in supposing that your right hand was the instrument that made the impressions in clay which I have just returned to my pocket. I seem to have made a terrible botch of this affair, all through. I will bid you good night again."

He turned away, but before he could reach the door she again stood before him with her back against it and her hand outstretched, precisely as she had done before, showing in the gesture that she had previously had no ulterior motive in thus exhibiting her hand.

"And—Chick?" she asked.

She uttered only those two words, but they conveyed a world of meaning. There was pathos, sorrow, pleading, supplication; all the emotions were contained in those two words when she uttered them.

The detective shrugged his shoulders.

"I think the incident of our acquaintance is closed, madam," he said, coldly.

"And—Chick?" she repeated.

"Chick has hitherto been quite competent to manage his own affairs," replied Nick. "I have no doubt that he still possesses sufficient talent to do so. I have nothing to change in the message I have asked you to deliver to him, if that is what you mean. It seems to me that his position in the matter remains unchanged, notwithstanding the difference in your own."

"You will not forgive him?" she pleaded.

"I have already forgiven him."

"You will not take him again to your heart?"

"I have, at the present moment, no desire ever to see him again, Miss Loring."

"You will not permit him to explain?"

"There seems to be nothing to explain."

"If I should tell you that Chick loves me? That I love him? That I have promised to be his wife? That we have known each other many months, and that he has kept our acquaintance a secret from you only because I demanded it of him? If I should assure you of the truth of all that—swear to it on my soul, my heart, my honor—would you still be obdurate?"

"You surprise me," said Nick calmly, "but I do not see that those facts affect the existing status of things in the least."

"It is all my own fault, Mr. Carter—not at all his—but all mine! all mine!" she insisted, clasping her hands together, and taking a step nearer to him.

"I haven't a doubt of it, madam, if you will permit me to agree with you."

"I have known of this masquerade of yours, and his, from the first."

"Quite likely."

"Won't you let me tell you—assure you—that my real reason for sending for you to come here to-night was to tell you all this? That it was my intention to let you study my hand as much as you cared to do so before you left me? That it was all a carefully laid plot of mine—and Chick's—to draw you into this thing for the sake of our little joke? That it has not once occurred to either of us that you would take such a serious view of the matter?"

The detective made no reply; but the expression of his face did not change. It was as cold, as hard, as unrelenting as ever, and she realized that she had made no impression upon him whatever.

Suddenly she turned squarely around and opened the door into the hallway.

"Chick!" she called, through the opening.

Nick did not move.

He heard the sound of footsteps descending the stairs, and the tread of Chick's feet—the rhythm of which he knew so well—coming along the hall; and then the chief assistant paused on the threshold of the doorway.

"Chick," he called out at once, "has Leila explained? Has she told you all about it, and do you forgive——"

He stopped with the sentence incomplete, for he saw that in the detective's face which effectually precluded further utterance on his part. Then he laughed, rather lamely, and added:

"You do not yet understand; eh?"

"If you will provide me with an address to which your effects can be sent, I will see to it that they are forwarded to you without delay," said the detective, without a change in the expression of his face and in a voice that was as calm as it was hard and unrelenting. "I would greatly prefer that you should not enter my house again."

Chick staggered backward as if he had received a blow in the face, and his face—from which he had removed all traces of disguise, as he had also done with his costume—went deadly white under the scathing words of his chief.

For a moment he did not reply; for that moment there was a deathlike stillness in the room; and then Chick, partly recovering, pulled himself together and straightened up to his full height, while he replied, as coldly and as concisely as Nick had spoken:

"You may send them to the Mammoth. I will claim them when I have need of them."

There was an electric button against the wall near where Chick was standing on the doorway, and he reached forward and pressed it.

There was a moment of silence after that, and then the butler, who had admitted Nick to the house, appeared on the scene.

"You may show this gentleman to the door, Perkins," said Chick quietly; and he stepped into the room and to one side in order to permit Nick to pass; and then, while the detective, after bowing coldly to Leila, passed out of his sight, he stood as rigidly in his tracks as any soldier at attention.

But Leila did not intend that the parting should take place without another effort of her own to bridge the chasm that had so suddenly yawned between Nick Carter and Chick.

She darted after the detective as he left the room, and she overtook him in the hallway, half-way to the outer door; and there she placed a detaining hand upon his arm, while she said to Perkins:

"Leave us, Perkins." And then she waited until the servant's footsteps had died away in the lower hall before she spoke again.

"Don't go away in this spirit, Mr. Carter," she pleaded. "It is all my fault. It is not at all the fault of Chick; not at all."

He shrugged his shoulders, and she went on rapidly:

"And we had so much more to tell you; so much that you have not heard. If you will stay to listen, it will explain all that you do not understand now. Believe me, it will. All this was intended only for a joke. It only came to our minds since you told Chick that you suspected me of being Captain Satan—and you know you believed at the same time that Rex Pentecost was in love with me, and you told Chick so. It only came to our minds after that. It was Chick who suggested that I should ask Rex to take me to luncheon at the Mammoth in order to meet you as Hassan El——"

"I beg that you will spare me the necessity of listening to further detail, Miss Loring," the detective interrupted her.

"You will not listen to me?"

"I very much prefer not to do so."

"But I assure you that there is more to tell—much more."

He attempted to pass her, but she detained him again.

"Listen to me," she demanded. "I know who Captain Satan is. Chick knows the identity of that highway robber. Chick will tell——"

With a sudden gesture the detective put her aside and strode past her to the door; and at the entrance he paused, turned, and said:

"Good night."

The next instant the door had closed behind him, and he was gone.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HIGHWAYMEN HELD UP.

It becomes necessary now to pass lightly over a short period with very slight reference to what happened during that interim.

When Nick Carter returned to the hotel after his interview at the home of Leila Loring, his first act was to pay his bill in the character of Hassan El Terik-Mir, and his next one was to return to his home and to remove at once all traces of the disguise.

Then he seated himself in the chair in his study, and he sat there the remainder of the night, never moving at all from the position he assumed, save to light a fresh cigar occasionally, or to knock the ashes from the one he was smoking.

The morning mail brought him a letter addressed in the well-known chirography of Chick; but he put it aside without opening it.

After breakfast, he left the house, simply leaving word that he would not return for several days; and from that moment all trace of him was lost to those who knew him best.

All that Joseph could reply over the telephone, when in the afternoon Chick called up the house, was that his master had gone away alone in his automobile, and that he did not know when he would return; and he added, in his conversation with Chick, that the baggage of the latter was already in the process of packing and would soon be despatched to the Hotel Mammoth.

"You may finish the packing," Chick told the valet, "but you need not send the baggage away from the house—at least not before your master returns. Tell him I said that, and if he insists upon sending it away—all right."

Chick hung up the phone then.

Where Nick Carter went and what he did for the balance of that day and the day following it does not appear in the records and has nothing whatever to do with this story. It is sufficient to state that he remained alone, without a companion; that at night he put up at a country hotel half-way between New York and Boston, and that he remained there, moody and silent, the greater part of the day following.

It was very late that afternoon when he determined to return home, and ordered his machine to be made ready for him; and once upon the road, with a clear track ahead of him, he opened her wide and spun along the highway at breakneck speed.

He was traveling along the old Boston turnpike road—the old post road, which is in existence to-day just as it was a hundred or more years ago, with the exception that it is a much better road now than then.

It was just dark when he passed New Haven, and exactly an hour later when he ran through Bridgeport. At Fairfield he stopped a few moments to procure some gasoline, and then on again through the night, which was cloudy and, therefore, very dark.

He was upon a short stretch of lonely road, midway between Harrisons and Mamaroneck, and speeding along at a rapid clip—it was after nine o'clock then—when in the distance ahead of him he suddenly discovered a shaft of light that extended across the road, not very far in advance of him.

He was at the time on a down-grade, although a very gentle one; but, nevertheless, it so happened that he had for the moment shut off his power, and the consequence was that his big Peerless car was running along the road as silently as a phantom.

He put on the brakes very gently, and so brought his machine to a stop within a hundred feet of the shaft of light, and without making a sound to apprise others of his propinquity.

Then, as silently, he leaped from the seat to the ground, and for a moment stood observing the scene that was being enacted before him, while a grim smile lighted up his sternly set features.

The scene, as may have been already guessed, was precisely the same as the one that had once been so graphically described to him by Reginald Pentecost.

The shaft of light stretched across the road and rested in a circle upon the figure of a Satan that stood at one side of the road, with extended arms and leveled pistols. Beyond the shaft of light, in the road, he could dimly observe the outlines of the front of a big automobile, and

he could hear voices engaged in a bantering conversation about the collection of highwaymen's toll; in other words, the machine beyond the shaft of light had encountered Captain Satan, the Devil Highwayman, and the latter, with his accomplices, was robbing the passengers.

The detective paused just one instant after he reached the ground; and then he ran softly over the grass toward a point a little behind the spot where the figure of Satan stood revealed so grotesquely.

Presently he dropped to his hands and knees and crept forward, and he made no sound at all until he was within reach of a figure that was stretched upon the ground in front of him.

Then, with a sudden motion, he reached out his hand and seized that individual, at the same time knocking aside a weapon that was raised, and placing his hand roughly over the victim's mouth.

"I am Nick Carter," he whispered. "If you breathe a word or a syllable without my order, by Heaven, I will kill you as I would a rat. Remember."

He removed his hand then, and quickly snapped handcuffs on the wrists and ankles of his captive.

"Now, madam," he said, "call that giant of a man over here. Do it so that he will suspect nothing, too. If you utter the slightest warning, I will stamp the life out of you as I would if you were a real snake instead of a human one. Call him."

The woman, in her rich contralto, called out:

"Karl, come here!" and she gave the order in German; and the reply came in the same tongue.

"What do you want?"

"Never mind. Come here at once," she said in reply, prompted by the detective.

He came lumbering toward them, and had almost reached the woman's side when a figure rose up out of the darkness beside him and dealt him a blow on the side of his head with the butt of a revolver which sent him headlong to the ground.

Nick knew that he would not stir again for some time to come, and he knew that the woman could not; so, uttering one more warning to her, he started rapidly toward the source of the light at the opposite side of the road, for he had already seen that the figure of Satan was as he had all along suspected—anything but a human being.

As he crossed the road he kept out of the shaft of light, and he arrived at the side of the machine which made the light without a sound and without being seen.

As he knew would be the case, another woman stood there; and it was the work of less than a moment for the detective to treat her precisely as he had treated that other one; and with a threat couched in very much the same language he left her and walked deliberately toward the people who were sitting quietly in their automobile while they were being robbed.

He appeared out of the darkness so suddenly, and so close to the seeming youth who was now doing the collecting alone, although he was continually calling for "Karl" to return, that there was no opportunity for resistance offered—and the supposed lad, who was really a girl in the clothing of a boy, speedily met with the same fate that had overtaken her companions; and while it was happening the occupants of the automobile looked on silently, at first under the impression that this was only another act in the drama in which they were so unwillingly participating.

But they were speedily put wise, to use a common expression; and the detective discovered that the gentleman who owned the automobile was no other than one of Pentecost's friends, Captain Donahue, with a party of women for guests.

"Hello, captain," said the detective. "You know me, don't you?"

"Nick Carter, by all that's great!" was the almost shouted reply.

"Yes," said Nick, smiling. "If you will get down a moment we will return this plunder to your friends, and then I wish you to help me pack these highwaywomen and their male friend into the tonneau of my machine."

"What about that devil over there, Carter? He looks ugly with those revolvers."

"Oh, he won't shoot. He is only rubbering; in fact, he is made of rubber—and the light will burn until I put it out. Come along."

A surprise awaited them all when they carried the giant of a fellow, who had been called Karl, to the tonneau of Nick's machine, and tossed him inside, after binding him securely. Beneath the rough clothing, the shock-haired wig and beard, and the lamp-black that he had smeared upon his face, they discovered the personality of another friend, and one who had claimed to have been robbed also; in a word, they found the German gentleman (!), Karl von Krebs.

And so it happened that an accident led Nick Carter to the discovery of the highwayman after all, for he had

come upon the scene of the robbery entirely without suspecting it, and when his thoughts were as far from that subject as they could well have been.

"I will ask you to follow me to police headquarters, Peerless, and took the wheel. "This particular robbery in New York," said the detective, as he climbed into his was not committed in that jurisdiction, but there have been others that were, and I think that New York is the best place for the outfit."

And so, in due course of time, they drew up before the white building in Mulberry street, where the prisoners were delivered into the keeping of the proper authorities.

We append a letter here, which Nick Carter forwarded to Chick the following morning:

"Dear Chick," it said. "I have discovered that even Nick Carter is not infallible. We are all likely to err, and in supposing that Miss Loring was Captain Satan I committed a great and a grave mistake. You have doubtless seen by the morning papers that I captured the highway robbers last night, just beyond Mamaroneck, on the Boston Road. The real leader proved to be Pentecost's friend Karl von Krebs, and I think now—of course—that I should have guessed it from the first, because of the extraordinary size of the man. The woman concealed behind the blown-up rubber figure of the devil, and whom we supposed all along to be Captain Satan—whose work it was to call out orders, and also to pull the strings which imparted lifelike motions to the figure—is the wife of Karl von Krebs, and the others are his two daughters, eighteen and twenty years old. It seems that they are all old offenders, well known to the German police, and that they have a record on the other side of the ocean. They used a covered surrey for conveying their implements to the scene of their activities, while Karl and his wife went on horseback, meeting the daughters at a specified place. Inasmuch as they have confessed to their crimes and have already agreed to plead guilty—they could do no less—their fate is assured.

"I have discovered, also, how it happens that Miss Loring told me that she knew the identity of Captain Satan the last time I saw her. Krebs has confessed that he held her up while she was passing through Lafayette Boulevard in her Columbia electric. He says that he threatened to kill her then and there, after she had recognized him, unless she swore not to betray him, and that she took the oath to save her life. I am glad that she is guiltless—less guilty than I, in fact.

"I have a word to add now concerning yourself.

"I am not yet satisfied in my own mind that you did right in your relations with me, and I think it best, therefore, that we remain apart for a time, at least. I have not yet brought myself to regard your conduct otherwise than as a betrayal of confidence, and a betrayal is a betrayal—nothing less, no matter what may be the extenuating circumstances. I do not say that this separation between us is final, unless you and your prospective wife choose that it shall be so; but it must be a separation for the present. Your chattels are at the Mammoth, where you directed that they should be sent.

"I wish you and your wife-to-be all happiness; and if this estrangement is final between us you may remember, as I shall, that I have loved you well; and of late, since the death of Ethel, better than I loved any other human being.

NICK CARTER."

THE END.

The next issue, No. 478, will be "A Wizard of the Highway; or, Nick Carter's Test of Faith," in which it will be seen how Nick and Chick came together again.

About the Early Numbers of

Tip Top Weekly

We receive hundreds of letters every week from readers asking if we can supply the early numbers of Tip Top containing Frank's adventures. In every case we are obliged to reply that numbers 1 to 300 are entirely out of print.

We would like to call the attention of our readers to the fact that the Frank Merriwell Stories now being published in book form in the Medal Library are inclusive of these early numbers. The first book to appear was No. 150 entitled "Frank Merriwell's Schooldays."

We give herewith a complete list of all the stories that have been published in book form up to the time of writing. We will be glad to send a free colored cover catalogue of the Medal Library which is just filled with good things for boys, upon receipt of a one-cent stamp to cover postage.

The Price of The Merriwell Books is Ten Cents per Copy. At all Newsdealers.

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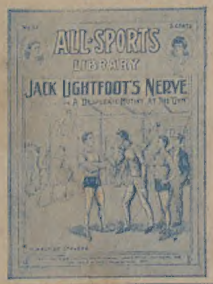

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